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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004276

SIPDIS

ISTANBUL PLS PASS TO ADANA

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SUBJECT: TRABZON: A CITY PASSED BY

REF: ANKARA 4117

(U) Classified by PolCounselor John Kunstadter for reasons
1.4 (b, d).

1. (C) Summary: Trabzon on the Black Sea has the potential to be a beautiful city. It falls short of that potential, however. As with the rest of Turkey, the city suffers from economic under-development and high real unemployment. The city has a reputation for being strongly nationalistic. However, Islam-oriented AKP remains the dominant party and in the aftermath of the recent capture of a young local soldier by the PKK, we saw no indication that nationalism is out of control. End Summary.

Trabzon's Reputation: A Conservative, Religious,
Patriotic, and Well-Armed City

2. (C) With its ancient heritage (including a church with important late-Byzantine frescoes), delicious regional cuisine, and inimitably recalcitrant sense of humor, Trabzon should be a beautiful city on the Black Sea coast. Flying into the birthplace of the great 16th century sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, we saw the vivid greens of hazelnut trees and tea bushes growing on mountainsides. However, lack of another kind of green (capital) and unemployment, however, has left the city under-developed and dominated (as is much of urban Anatolia) by ugly Turco-Stalinist architecture. There has been an attempt to turn the waterfront west of the harbor into a public park, but the result is a dirty and haphazard collection of tea gardens and deathtrap playgrounds.

3. (C) At the Trabzon airport we were reminded that many men in the region are armed when we saw fifteen of the roughly sixty men on the plane lined up to retrieve their handguns from the airport authorities after the flight. In other words, 25 percent of the men from this admittedly unscientific sample were "packin' heat."

4. (C) Though the city has a reputation for being religious and conservative, we were surprised to see that about half the women were not wearing a headscarf, and that the other half that did donned brightly colored scarves, not at all like their sisters in other cities in Anatolia.

5. (C) Travel guides warn tourists that prostitution is prevalent in Trabzon. It is (reftel).

6. (C) As elsewhere in Turkey, the people in Trabzon are feeling the economic pinch. We were hard-pressed to find a taxi at the airport and throughout our stay we saw very few taxis. We were told that most of the population use minibuses (dolmus) because they are cheaper. All but one of our contacts in Trabzon said unemployment is the city's biggest problem. The exception was the mayor. In an effort to keep the focus on something he could actually fix, he asserted that trash removal is Trabzon's number one concern.

Is Nationalism on the Rise in Trabzon?

7. (C) In the spring, on the heels of the trampling of a Turkish flag by Kurdish youths in Mersin, Trabzon witnessed the near-lynching of five young adults who were purported to be brandishing a Kurdish flag. No contact brought up the incident, but each, when probed, repeated to us that the situation was grossly exaggerated by the media, and that while Trabzon residents are fiercely patriotic, events were not as dire as reported. One businessman did offer that the event had been a provocation, though there has been no evidence of such. There was no noticeable surplus of Turkish flags waving in the Trabzon breeze (when there was one) either.

8. (C) The right-wing ultra-nationalistic Nationalist Action Party (MHP) refused to meet with us. The governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), the left of center Republican People's Party (CHP) and the center-right Motherland Party (ANAVATAN) officials, as well as a group of businessmen and people on the street rejected claims of MHP's increasing

popularity and disproportionate strength.

19. (C) Though many commentators have said that nationalism is on the rise in Turkey, we do not believe it is out of control in Trabzon. All the leaders we saw in Trabzon--from the deputy governor, the mayor, the chief prosecutor, deputy police chief, local businessmen, to the leaders of three main parties--realize that the spring's near-lynching episode hurt Trabzon's national and international image and seem keen to keep a similar event from re-occurring. While we were in Trabzon, a young man from the province serving in the military was taken hostage by PKK insurgents in the southeast of Turkey. There were no rallies, riots or displays of rabid nationalism in the aftermath of his capture, providing a further indication that this patriotic region is not currently bubbling over with jingoistic violence.

Politics, Soccer & Conspiracy Theories

10. (C) AKP remains the dominant political party in Trabzon. AKP controls a majority of seats on the city council and sent six of the eight Trabzon MPs to the national parliament. Trabzon's mayor Volkan Canalioglu, however, is from CHP. Two local university professors told us that his being a well-known local soccer star and PM Erdogan's admission to being a Fenerbahce (Istanbul) fan helped at the polls. The local Trabzonspor soccer team last won the national championship almost a generation ago. Nevertheless, unlike most Turkish soccer fans who support one of the three main Istanbul teams, regardless of where they live in Turkey, Trabzonites remain fanatical Trabzonspor supporters. Erdogan has now appointed a former Trabzonspor star as his Minister of Public Works and has apparently funneled millions of dollars into the teams coffers in an attempt to buy back Trabzonites' loyalty.

11. (C) Meetings with AKP, CHP and ANAVATAN all started with pledges of friendship and denial of anti-American sentiments. All conveyed disappointment in their perception of a lack of U.S. support in fighting the PKK and asserted that the U.S. must "let the Turks know what its plans are."

12. (C) Conspiracy theories abound in Trabzon, no different than any other city in Turkey. A member of ANAVATAN asked if we were there to scout out areas for "the new U.S. military base." The press, too, was interested to learn our "real" motive for the visit. Conversely, several contacts did say that it was good of the USG to take an interest in Trabzon by sending us there.

13. (C) With the passing of a well-known Black Sea folk singer from cancer, rumors abound that the rate of cancer deaths in the region has skyrocketed due to Chernobyl fallout. Our physician contact in Trabzon as well as the GOT have seen no evidence that this is the case, though there have been no real scientific data collection and analysis. Two attorneys we met with plan to organize (with the help of local pharmacists) an informal survey to satisfy their strong feelings that there is a significant increase in cancer deaths, especially among young adults, be it from Chernobyl or another source.
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